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NEW YORK, USA

W20 INDIA 2023

**GRASSROOTS LEADERSHIP
AND TRANSFORMATION**

**Charting the path of empowerment
through technology and skill development**

ABOUT W20



The Women 20 (W20) is the official G20 engagement group, created in 2015 under Türkiye's Presidency of the G20, with the objective of focusing on gender equity. The primary objective of W20 is women's empowerment, advocating for the rights of women, and raising their voices in society. It was founded on the idea that domestic initiatives needed to be incorporated into an international strategy to see any appreciable changes because progress toward gender equality had been too slow and peripheral. Additionally, it aims to ensure that the G20 Leaders' Declaration includes commitments and measures that support gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

W20 India is committed to its vision "to create a world of equality & equity where every woman lives with dignity". It is dedicated to its mission of "removing all barriers to women-led development and ensuring an enabling environment and ecosystem for women to thrive, transcend and transform their lives as well as others."

W20 India is focused on empowering women by working on 5 key priority areas that include Women Entrepreneurship, Grassroot Women Leadership, Bridging the Gender Digital Divide, Education and Skill Development, and Climate Change.



MEETING REPORT

16th March 2023:

A side event titled “**Grassroots leadership and transformation: Charting the path of empowerment through technology and skill development**” was hosted by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations in partnership with W20, the official engagement group of G20 on women’s economic empowerment at Conference room 2, Conference Building, United Nations, New York.

Digital transformation provides new avenues for the economic empowerment of women and can contribute to greater gender equality. The Internet, digital platforms, mobile phones and digital financial services offer ample opportunities for women and girls and can help bridge the divide by enabling them to earn additional income, increase their employment opportunities, and enhance their network through social media. While Information Communication Technology (ICT) is recognized as having the potential to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment, a digital gender divide has been identified, whereby women and girl’s access and use ICTs less than men and boys, which exacerbates gender inequalities.

Without increased digital adoption and use, women & girls will have fewer employment opportunities and will face additional barriers to workforce participation. Closing the digital divide for them needs tailored understanding and actions for each of these barriers. To discuss key challenges and issues in ensuring universal access to internet and technology in India, the event opened platform for speakers and delegates across G20 nations for charting out a road map on skilling girls and women to bridge the gap in workforce participation as well as in access and use of technology.



On the occasion, Her Excellency, Permanent Representative of India to the UN, Ambassador Ms. Ruchira Kamboj, the Executive Director of UN Women Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Dr. Sandhya Purecha, Chair of W20, Dr. JyotiKiran Shukla, Economist & Policy Expert, Ms. Bharati Ghosh, Former Indian Police Service officer & Former UN official, Ms. Cheryl Miller, W20 EU, Ms. Susan Jane Ferguson, Country Representative at UN Women India Ambassadors and delegates of W20 were present. The CSW side event witnessed large participation of representatives from UN member states, UN officials, civil society organizations and academic institutions.



Dharitri Patnaik moderated the Side Event emphasizing on the imperative need for bridging the Gender Digital Divide. She said; “The process of achieving gender equality has slowed down due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The measures taken by the G20 countries to mitigate the economic and social impact of the covid-19 crisis yet evidence from many countries shows a disproportionate impact on women especially those younger, low skilled or from ethnic minorities.

The mission is to remove all barriers to Women-led development and ensure an enabling environment and ecosystem for women to thrive as well as others further building an equitable and sustainable future for all. Globally data from 2020 shows that 76% of urban households had access to internet; which is twice as much as rural. India has become a prominent nation in deploying technology to transform lives of its people. In order to be part of the digital knowledge economy, the call to bridge the digital gap and digital inclusion has grown louder.’ She highlighted the objective of the event which is to deliberate and discuss issues in ensuring universal access to internet and technological innovations as well as charting out a roadmap on skilling women and girls.



Her Excellency Ruchira Kamboj, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations (UN); said that India today is going through major transformational changes with the transition happening from women's equity and empowerment to women-led development. The nation's belief and determination remove every obstacle in the way of women's progress and firm conviction that gender does not define potential is forming the very basis of nation's empowerment.

The four key aspects that stand out are that the number of girls going to high school & beyond have tripled in last years and more of them are going for science, engineering & technology which is at 43% as compared to the global average of 36%. Schemes such as KIRAN, UDAAN, PRAGATI, Vigyan Jyoti, etc. have fuelled the flight for these girls. Women are taking entrepreneurship like never before with a vast majority of beneficiaries of the MUDRA loan are women at 70%. The current government facilitates direct transfer of these benefits thus ensuring fare practice. Her Excellency concluded with; "At the grassroots level in India; more than 1.4 million elected women representatives lead in the formulation and implementation of public policies which is highly commendable."



Her Excellency Sima Sami Bahous, Ex. Director of UN Women, addressed the panel highlighting the fact that the discussion goes to the core of the CSW-67's priority theme, which is ensuring that technological transformation promotes gender equality & women's empowerment around the world. The gender digital divide has become a new form of poverty in the face of gender inequality for millions. Highlighting the key areas of action Her Excellency remarked; first is to close the gender digital divide since women are less likely than men to have meaningful access to technology due to barriers like cost, education etc. and 25 % less likely than men to possess efficient digital knowledge & skills.

Second is to ensure jobs & leadership roles for women in the digital technology & innovation sectors. This means actively fostering inclusive & transformative innovation ecosystems as well as digital skills so that women do not lose out in the rapidly growing online economy.

Third is to put principles of inclusion, intersectionality and systemic change at the core of digitization to address the exclusion linked to societal stereotypes by bringing together all the socializing agents that influence girls' choices and interests.



Fourth being ensuring transparency & accountability of digital technology to be safe, inclusive, affordable & accessible without embedded bias. Digital tools and services must address the most pressing needs of girls and women by adopting participatory designs where women lead and influence products. Finally creating online spaces that are safe, free of violence & abuse with mechanisms and clear accountability to tackle all kinds of harassment, discrimination & hate speech.

She further added that the government of India's Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology and UN Women launched a challenge for women entrepreneurs to propose technological solutions to combat covid related issues; in which 1200 responses were received that involved AI (Artificial Intelligence) to curb these. Her Excellency concluded with remarks; "CSW-67th will set the global informative framework for gender equality, technology & innovation. I hail the Government of India for including Women-led Development in its presidency's priority areas."





Dr. Sandhya Purecha, Chair of W20 spoke about India's massive infrastructure push in the digitisation process and how Women are driving digital technologies in a variety of ways, from developing new products and technologies to leading digital innovation in their respective fields. Speaking about Prime Minister's progressive schemes such as National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM), 'Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)', 'National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology' (NMEICT) Scheme, SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds), SWAYAM PRABHA, National Digital Library (NDL), Virtual Lab, e-Yantra, NEAT (National Education Alliance for Technology) etc.



Dr. Purecha said, with these interventions India has moved from women development to women-led development in the last nine years keeping digital and financial inclusion at the core of this. Women 20 acknowledges that there are still challenges and gaps in digital inclusion and hence, W20 advocates for some of the effective strategies to address the gender inequalities in digital inclusion process, she added.



The panel discussion was taken forward with the eminent panelists reflecting challenges, best practices and building collaborative approach to ensure equitable access to internet and technology especially for women and girls.

Dr, JyotiKiran Shukla, Economist & Policy Expert responding to the question about digitalization of decentralized governance structure said, 'Women led Development'; along with being a positive intervention, it has economic sense to it. With more labour force participation of women, India is one among the trajectory of few countries to maintain 7-8 percentage growth rates & digitalization is playing a key role in it. To productively involve in labour force, nearly 1.4 million women at grassroots need access to finance to remove the barriers that restrict them. Referring to the Rajasthan state government's special initiatives, she emphasized that to script development index in terms of digital language, a radical change in financial architecture is required to promote digital governance and skill building.



Ms. Bharati Ghosh, Former Indian Police Service Officer & Former UN Official mentioning about her experience with various schemes and programmes of India at grassroots level towards bridging the gender digital divide said, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, technology revolutions were harnessed during COVID-19 crisis. India made history as it rolled out the largest vaccination drive; vaccinating 220 Crs. Indians along with millions overseas. A parallel revolution took place in the country where thousands of women at grassroots; the ASHAs, Anaganwadi workers and the Female Health Workers as 'Digital Sarthaks' mobilized and facilitated COVID information to communities, leading to women empowerment.





By series of significant national schemes, Hon'ble Prime Minister brought transformation in lives of millions of women in India. She appraised the 'Mudra Yojana', which has reached out to 390 Millions of small and micro women entrepreneurs through institutional credit of whom 74% of women who belong to marginalized sections. 81% of 'Start-up India' scheme holders are women with 92 thousands accounts and total of 21,000 crore have been disbursed for women led enterprises and 12 million self-help groups.

In last 8 years, more than 80 million women are working in group mode and a funds of 55 trillion credit support is extended to them. Reiterating Pradhan Mantri's different initiatives, Ms. Ghosh added that 55% users of universal banking facilities system under 'Jan DhanYojana' are women, women constitute 34% in IT workforce and 10,000 women are employed through world's largest women run E-scooter factory whereas 45% start-ups are owing to women entrepreneurs, 15% of India's unicorns are women founders.

Ms. Bharati Ghosh remarked, at top governance 11 out of 78 union ministers are women and grassroots democracy, women constitute 78% at panchayat level. 28% of women officers in defence sector with permanent status making women led development as priority of nation's development agenda



Explaining the role of international organizations in bridging gender digital divide at grassroots level, Ms. Susan Ferguson said, in a country like India having incredible potential and where amazing works being done, international organizations like UN Women is to convene people from different sectors to work together to pilot different interventions which can be scaled up and doing research for government to take up policies and programmes.

Giving instances of UN Women's similar initiatives such as setting up of 'Women Empowerment Hubs', Ms. Susan said, the hub is equipped with different tools that help women in aspirational districts to learn and access digital world. Industrial Training Institutes in collaboration with different industries are able to provide training and placements to women and girls in different technical jobs and the partnership of UN Women with Niti Ayog has leveraged collaboration among government, private sectors and women communities to support women entrepreneurs towards enhancing their access in supply chains.

Cheryl Denise Miller, Delegate of W20 European Union, said that India's achievement and success stories should go out for the west to echo, emulate and replicate them. The situation of gender digital divide is urgent. There are 240 million more men than women having access to technology. Referring to suggestions of Chat GPT (an AI language model), Ms. Cheryl said; the most important thing in closing the gender digital divide requires a sustained and coordinated effort by multiple stakeholders.

She added; "We can do two things regarding this; one is that Digital Equity for women's empowerment should be the centerpiece for local, national and global policy making. Second is 'Paid Apprenticeship' programs for IT expertise targeting mature women should be introduced." Ms. Cheryl also remarked that; "We should move from tech-enabled entrepreneurship to tech-driven entrepreneurship with more women as founders of tech-startups and they should be support in terms of funding."



The panelists were asked to give one recommendation which the global leaders should take note of. Ms. Susan Ferguson suggested “Three things that should really be considered are universal access to smart phones which includes data access at affordable rates, digital literacy and work on social norms that govern access and literacy as mentioned.” Dr. JyotiKiran Shukla placed before the panel; “Removing invisibility in empowerment which requires data by which we mean digital data and collaborate with consensus and energize with participation.”

Ms. Bharati Ghosh said that “As the Hon’ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi ji says that gone are the days of women as homemakers, now is the time to see them as nation builders. For e.g. the Jal Jivan Mission which provides water to every household in rural India; along with providing water to 110 million households; brought 6 million women to leadership by training them with Smart Phones and Field Testing Kits on Collection, Safe-guarding and management of water as well as monitoring its quality.”

Finally Ms. Cheryl Miller ended with her final remarks; “Two silver bullets; better and more portrayal of girls and women in media. Rewarded paternity leaves so that women’s participation outside the house is increased.